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A course design for remedial English is defined and described in terms of the college student, his previous knowledge and experience, reading skills, personality, and emotional reactions. Academic objectives are outlined, taking into account individual differences and needs. Emphasis is placed on teacher guidance and counseling in the development of student self-knowledge and the building of a positive attitude toward reading. (CW)

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BASIC ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF AN EFFECTIVE REMEDIAL PROGRAM

A Statement by a Committee Considering a Proposal for a New Remedial Program at Wright College:

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Any design for an effective remedial program must rest upon certain assumptions concerning the nature of remedial students and what can and should be done for them. These assumptions are here set forth in a definition and description of remedial students and in a statement of consequent general requirements for the design of an effective remedial program.

DEFINITION OF REMEDIAL STUDENTS

Remedial students are here defined as those students who elect a transfer program but do not perform successfully in it. More specifically they are students whose grade averages in the transfer program are below C or who drop out of the transfer program while performing at an F, D, or low C level. Since the ref-

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erence here is to general grade averages rather than to specific grades in individual courses, the definition would include students who make grades of C and above in some courses or areas but whose overall average is below C, and would exclude students who make D or F in certain courses or areas but whose overall average is at least C.

This definition does not rest on any specified grading standards, such as those now in use at Wright, but rather would apply to any standards that might be adopted. It clearly assumes that if selection of these students were perfect, students remaining in the transfer program would not then receive grades distributed over the entire grading curve but would instead receive only grades of A, B, or C.

The term developmental is increasingly being used today in place of the term remedial in order to avoid the pejorative connotations that have become attached to remedial and the implication that there is some defective condition that must be remedied. The selection of a term to designate a remedial program is very important, and the term remedial is almost certainly not satisfactory. However, for the sake of convenience in communication the traditional term remedial will be used in this discussion.

DESCRIPTION OF REMEDIAL STUDENTS

The principal characteristics of remedial students, or at least those characteristics that should be taken into consideration in designing a remedial program, can be grouped under three

headings: (1) knowledge and experience, (2) skills and habits relevant to academic performance, (3) attitudes, emotions, and other personality factors relevant to academic performance. Classification under these three headings is not intended to suggest that the characteristics are actually separate in their effects or that it is easy to distinguish and classify them.

Obviously not all remedial students have all of these characteristics, and these characteristics are not limited to remedial students. However, they are to be found in greater frequency among remedial students than among successful transfer students and must be considered in planning instruction and counseling for a remedial program.

In this description implied comparisons are always to students who succeed in the transfer program.

Knowledge and experience

The level of knowledge of remedial students is generally lower than that of regular students, especially in academic subject matter areas. The knowledge that they have is less apt to be derived from reading and school instruction. Their vocabularies are smaller and less precise.

Their general experience tends to be more limited, and its elements tend to remain discrete bits rather than to be integrated into meaningful concepts.

Skills and habits relevant to academic performance

Remedial students have important deficiencies in their reading skills, in their oral and written communication skills, and in other skills and habits directly and indirectly related to academic performance.

Reading skills. One of the most important deficiencies of remedial students is in their reading ability. They (1) have difficulty understanding what they read and (2) often do not make satisfactory use of what they read. The latter is especially important since it is frequently overlooked in remedial reading programs. Because of the importance of reading instruction in a remedial program, a somewhat detailed discussion of the deficiencies of remedial students in reading is appropriate here. These deficiencies can best be shown by contrasting the performance of remedial readers with that of good readers.

Good readers (1) understand what they read and (2) make use of what they read.

(1) Understanding involves the application of three types of general skills to the many types of elements of which a written text is composed. The elements of which a written text is composed may be listed as follows:

(1) words

(2) syntactic elements, such as phrases, clauses, and sentences

(3) pairs or small groups of consecutive sentences

(4) paragraphs and large groups of consecutive sentences

(5) groups of consecutive paragraphs and major sections of a chapter or article

(6) entire chapters and articles

(7) groups of consecutive chapters and entire books

These elements could of course be grouped into fewer or more items, but the above listing bears a useful relationship to particular skills that must be included in an effective program of reading instruction.

The three types of general skills that are applied to these elements are the following:

(1) recognition

(2) perception of structural relationships

(3) interpretation

Recognition is the association of what appears in print in the text with what the reader habitually says or hears. For example, the reader pronounces a word in the text as he would habitually pronounce it in speaking, or reads a sentence in the text with the rhythm, phrasing, and intonation that he would normally use in speaking. Even for most good readers recognition is applied only to the first three elements (words, syntactic elements, and pairs or small groups of consecutive sentences), for these are the only ones that are part of ordinary conversation and oral discussion. The others are found almost exclusively in written texts (including speeches made from written texts).

Perception of structural relationships is the appropriate association of certain elements within the text with other elements within the text and the grasping of the idea that results from this association and that goes beyond the mere sum of the separate elements. For example, the reader associates the words and phrases of a sentence (or small group of sentences) together and grasps the meaning of the complete sentence, which is of course more than

merely a listing of the separate meanings of the words and phrases of the sentence. Consider the following simple case:

> The dog bit the man.
> The man bit the dog.

Although the words and the meanings of the words in these two sentences are the same, the structural relationships among the words create very different meanings for the two sentences as wholes.

Or consider the following more subtle case:

> The bombing of targets in North Vietnam has so far not forced the North Vietnamese to seek a negotiated settlement of the war. Therefore, the bombing should be stopped.
>
> The bombing of targets in North Vietnam has so far not forced the North Vietnamese to seek a negotiated settlement of the war. But the bombing should be stopped.

Understanding the subtle and significant difference in meaning between these two passages depends not only upon knowing the difference in meaning of the two different words but also upon perceiving the relationships between each of these two words and the context in which each is found. Perception of structural relationships may involve the association of much larger elements, such as the association of two consecutive chapters of a text in an appropriate logical relationship in order to grasp the unifying idea underlying the juxtaposing, ordering, and separating of the two chapters, an idea that may not be stated explicitly in either of the two chapters.

Interpretation is the appropriate association of collections of past knowledge and experience with elements and combinations of elements from the text. For example, the reader associates a recollection of the meaning of a word with that word in the text or associates a recollection of a complex set of personal experiences

with the overall concept developed in a chapter of a book. In short, he gives "meaning" to what he reads.

Of course, in the actual reading process none of the skills can be performed in isolation from the others, and none of the elements is separable from the others.

(2) In addition to understanding what they read, good readers make use of what they read. This second point is especially important since it is frequently neglected in remedial instruction and is perhaps the most importnat distinction between good readers and weak readers. Making use of what is read is what gives a reader the satisfaction that leads him to read again. If a reader makes use of what he reads to communicate to others with satisfying results, or to engage in satisfying physical activity, or even to engage in satisfying private thought or flights of imagination, then he will read again. (The behavior has been reinforced.) If he does not make use of what he reads with such satisfying results, then the tendency to read again will be diminished. The skill of reading, like any other skill, cannot be developed or maintained without practice. A good reader is not merely <u>able</u> to read. He <u>does</u> read, and he makes use of what he reads in some way that gives him satisfaction, a satisfaction that will lead him to read again.

The reading performance of remedial students tends toward the negative of this performance of successful students. Many remedial students have difficulties with recognition, in some cases very serious difficulties. (These difficulties are made more complex when the normal spoken dialect of the students differs from that

of their teachers. The teachers are apt to regard as mistakes instances in which a student translates what is printed in the text into the pronunciation and syntax of his normal dialect, yet such translation is actually a sign of good rather than bad reading. For example, a student who orally reads "He doesn't know his own mind" as "He don' know his own mine" immediately recognizes what is printed in the text as the equivalent of what he normally says and hears in his community. (His understanding is probably clear and immediate.)

Remedial students also have difficulties with the perception of structural relationships. Their ability to associate words and phrases into syntactic units such as sentences and grasp the meanings of the syntactic units is often limited. In addition, they have difficluty perceiving relationships among larger elements, for their handicaps in recognition and in perception of relationships among words and phrases interferes with their reading longer passages with sufficient comprehension of the parts to enable them to find meaningful relationships among the larger elements. Although most college freshmen have not been taught to perceive relationships among those larger elements, average and above average readers can learn to do it or can muddle through. Without special instruction, remedial students have a serious handicap.

Finally, remedial students have difficulties with interpretation. Their experience and knowledge, including vocabularies, are limited, not only because of limited personal experiences but also because their reading deficiencies have interfered with their acquiring the substantial body of information that more fortunate

students have acquired. Not only are their experience and knowledge limited, but their capacity to combine separate experiences and bits of knowledge into new and complex concepts is limited. And finally their capacity to associate their experiences and knowledge with what they find in a printed text is limited.

In view of their handicaps in reading, it is to be expected that remedial students do not make satisfactory use of what they read. But even if they did understand a particular text, there would be further obstacles to their making use of their understanding. Their capacity to communicate ideas to others, especially in writing, is limited, and their capacity (including memory) to apply their understanding to examinations and other school tasks or to other satisfying activities is limited.

As long as they do not make use of what they read in satisfying ways, they will not read willingly. They will then tend to read as little as possible or not at all, and since all skills require practice not only for improvement but also to maintain a given level of proficiency, remedial students will become even more deficient in their reading ability.

Oral and written communication skills. In addition to deficiencies in reading, remedial students have deficiencies in their ability to communicate both orally and in writing. Their communication deficiencies result in part from their limited experience and knowledge and their deficiencies in reading and in part from other causes. Their limited experiences and knowledge and their reading deficiencies restrict the content of their communications and thereby prevent the communications from having

the satisfactory reception by listeners and readers (usually teachers) that would make the act of communication satisfying to the communicants. As in the case of reading, a lack of satisfying results from the use of the skills leads to a tendency not to use them and to a resultant lessening of the skills.

When they do communicate, the structure of their communications tends to be limited to the structure of casual conversation. Even when they write long papers, the papers tend to have the structure of bits of conversation strung together rather than the fully developed, organized, logical structures normally found in lengthy written papers.

Remedial students tend to speak non-standard dialects, especially with respect to pronunciation and syntax, and have difficulty writing standard English with normal conventions of spelling and punctuation. Although many transfer students share this difficulty, it is undoubtedly more common among remedial students. (However, the consequences of this difficulty for academic success in college may not be as clear, or as serious, as many teachers believe.)

Other skills and habits directly and indirectly related to academic performance. In addition to deficiencies in reading and communication skills, remedial students have deficiencies in many other skills that affect academic performance. They have trouble following lectures and discussions and taking useful notes. They do not study effectively, and they have difficulty taking tests and performing other tasks required of successful students (including laboratory work). With respect to habits indirectly related to academic performance, they tend to watch entertaining rather than informative TV programs and to seek recreational activities

of a non-intellectual, non-cultural type.

In general, habits involving the behaviors necessary for academic success are not well established for remedial students. Consequently, what academic behaviors they do have can be easily extinguished by a few failures.

Attitudes, emotions, and other personality factors relevant to academic performance

With respect to attitudes remedial students can most easily be described in terms of what they lack or are unaware of. They tend to lack self-esteem and self-confidence, especially in situations associated with the academic aspects of school. As a result of their limited knowledge and deficiencies in reading and communications skills, their oral class contributions have frequently not been well received by more able classmates and by teachers. They have thus developed the belief that what they might say in class is wrong or of no value. They have no faith in their own worth as contributors to a serious discussion. Perhaps most important, they believe that their teachers generally do not have confidence in them and do not expect them to succeed. (Ironically, this lack of self-confidence may be masked unconsciously by an aggressive participation in class or an aggressive assertion of ability not actually demonstrated in academic performance.)

As a further consequence of deficiencies in reading and communication skills, remedial students may lack a feeling of being able to participate effectively in social communications. This adversely affects their social adjustment, possibly more seriously for men than for women.

Remedial students lack a clear understanding of their capacities, their goals, and what these goals imply for them. Their goals are often only vaguely defined, if at all, and they have no clear understanding of the consequences of actually achieving the goals. They do not realize what commitments of effort, time, and money would be required of them to achieve the goals. They usually do not see any relationship between their present academic activities and their goals. They are unaware of alternative goals that are perhaps more appropriate to their capacities and to the commitments in energy, time, and money they can realistically make in order to achieve the goals. And they are unaware of ways to pursue these goals.

Although remedial students do have genuine learning handicaps, they often have misconceptions concerning the real nature and consequences of these handicaps. These misconceptions frequently inhibit their academic performance. They tend generally to believe that they have limited ability (intelligence, aptitude, etc.) and that there is therefore a low ceiling on their achievement possibilities. Consequently, they believe that serious or extended effort is not really worthwhile since really good results are impossible. (Teachers often share this view, which is sometimes manifested in the statement that teachers should not delude remedial students into thinking that they can succeed.) This attitude on the part of remedial students is especially common in English and language arts, where a serious lack of understanding of the nature of language and language learning (a lack fostered and perpetuated by most elementary and secondary instruction)

leads to belief in poor reading ability and general lack of aptitude for English, including all subjects with which the label might be associated. This attitude can easily spread from English to other subject areas where considerable reading is required. A similar attitude, although certainly resulting from different causes, is frequently found in mathmatics and physical science, especially among women.

Remedial students are often unaware of their actual behaviors in various academic situations and of the possible aversive consequences of some of these behaviors. For example, a student may be unaware of his tendency frequently to gaze out the window or to hum to himself when he is doing a difficult reading assignment and unaware that the adverse effects of these behaviors on his comprehension and retention are at least part of the cause for his subsequent low grade on a test.

Remedial students are often unaware of emotions or feelings that are aroused by various academic situations and of the avoidance behaviors that these emotions or feelings frequently lead to. For example, fear of failing a certain type of test may lead a student to avoid studying for it so that he can light-heartedly attribute his failure on the test to not studying instead of more painfully having to admit to inadequate mental ability for passing that type of test. These feelings often take the form of an aversion to an entire subject area, sometimes even for students who are quite successful in other areas. These emotions or feelings were probably first aroused at ages when the students were unable to perceive and understand the sources of the emotions. By the time the students reached ages at which they could have dealt consciously with the sources of such emotions, the emotions were

already deeply linked with the situations that aroused them, and the students were not prompted to examine consciously the emotions or their sources.

Remedial students may have psychological, physical, or social problems that interfere with academic success, but they are usually unaware of the exact relationships between these problems and their academic performances and are unaware of ways to cope with these problems or of sources of help in dealing with them. They may have behavior patterns, value systems, etc., that conflict with the demands of their academic programs and be unaware of the conflicts and their consequences. For example, a student may be working too many hours in order to meet the payments on a car that he "needs"as a status symbol in a world that seems to offer him very few sources of security.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DESIGN OF AN EFFECTIVE REMEDIAL PROGRAM

In addition to the above assumptions concerning (1) the knowledge and experience of remedial students, (2) their skills and habits relevant to academic performance, and (3) their attitudes, emotions, and other personality factors relevant to academic performance, a major assumption concerning the purpose of a remedial program must be made explicit. This assumption is that the purpose of a remedial program is (1) to develop the academic abilities of all remedial students as much as possible within the limits of the program and (2) to develop self-confidence, self-awareness, and other personal qualities that will lead them to use these

abilities with maximum effectiveness in pursuit of realistically appropriate goals. This means that some graduates of a really effective program will elect and successfully follow a transfer program while others will willingly and successfully move in other directions more appropriate to their capacities and circumstances.

As a consequence of these assumptions, there are certain general requirements for an effective remedial program. These requirements are concerned with the development of skills necessary for academic success and with the development of attitudes and qualities of personality that will contribute to maximum effectiveness in the use of these skills.

Development of academic skills

Instruction in the program should concentrate on the development of reading skills, communication skills, and other skills necessary for academic success, but this does not mean that content or subject matter areas can be excluded. Effective development of these skills requires not merely instruction in the skills but also opportunities for applying them successfully to materials and tasks such as would realistically be found in the transfer program. Therefore, the remedial program must include materials, assignments, tasks, instructional methods and situations, etc., from the major subject matter areas. Instruction in certain aspects of subject matter is also essential for the development of interpretation skills in reading.

Reading skills. The program must provide students with the skills necessary for getting usable understanding of the types of texts that they will have to read in the transfer program,

and it must provide them with what is necessary for making satisfying use of their understanding so that reading will become a permanent, rewarding activity for them. It must improve their recognition and perception of structural relationships among words and syntactic elements, but many remedial students will not soon overcome their handicaps here. Therefore, the program must give them techniques for perceiving structural relationships among larger elements despite basic handicaps. Here it would put considerable emphasis on prereading or skimming as a means of finding those passages on which to concentrate, those passages that will most quickly give an understanding of the major ideas in an article or book. It would also give considerable attention to providing the students with the abstract logical frameworks or patterns necessary for relating ideas. In all of this instruction the program must use the same types of readings as are actually used in the transfer program--same subjects, same length, same level of difficulty--for the objective is to prepare the students to perform successfully in the transfer program.

The program must also develop interpretation skills. What is needed here is much more than vocabulary building, the frequent concern of remedial reading instruction. The program must increase the useful experience and knowledge of the students. However, since many remedial students have serious deficiencies built up over many years, a program of reasonable length could not be expected to bring them up to the level of normal transfer students with respect to their total knowledge and experience.

Therefore, the program should select from the various subject matter areas those concepts that seem to offer the greatest potential return for the time invested in studying them, e.g., concepts such as cause, effect, heredity, environment, economic, social, dynamic, static, real, artificial, etc. These would not be treated as items in a vocabulary list to be translated into sets of synonymous words. Instead, students would learn to associate with these labels various elements of their own experiences and various elements of knowledge acquired from readings and discussions in a variety of subject matter areas until they developed full and vivid understandings of the concepts. There would be considerable emphasis on developing the ability to combine separate bits of knowledge and experience into new concepts, an ability that is probably closely related to what is generally called intelligence. And there would naturally be considerable emphasis on developing the ability to associate experience and knowledge with what is found in a printed text.

In addition to developing remedial students' ability to understand what they read, the program must give them opportunities and means for making use of what they read. It must give them opportunities to discuss what they read with teachers and classmates and to write about it. And it must do this without the threat of the red marks that they regularly find on their papers in English classes. While they should be given positive suggestions on how best to organize and develop an idea in writing, they should not be criticized for any mechanical or other faults in their writing. The experience of writing to others about what

they read must be entirely pleasant. In addition to opportunities for using their reading in communication, the program should provide opportunities for using their reading in physical activities, such as performing experiments in science laboratories. Since many remedial students are not verbally oriented, opportunities for using reading in such physical activities are especially important.

In providing opportunities and means for developing the students' capacity to make use of what they read, the program must consider the limited memory span of remedial students. The interval between the reading and the use must be short, or there must be special means for stimulating the memory.

It must be emphasized that, if reading skills are to be developed effectively so that they will continue to be practiced in the transfer program and thereby maintained and improved, the reading material used must be closely similar to that actually used in the various subject matter courses of the transfer program and the uses to which the reading is put must be closely similar to those actually found in the subject matter courses. Without these similarities the gains made by students in the remedial program will tend to disappear after they enter the transfer program.

Communication skills. The program must develop the students' skills in participating in oral discussions such as are to be found in various subject matter transfer courses and in making moderately extended oral presentations of logically structured ideas. As with reading, the results of these activities must be pleasant. That is, the attitudes of teachers and classmates toward the communicant must be favorable with respect to his act

of communicating even though they may disagree with what he says. This further requires that the program develop in the students the ability to listen to speakers in such a way that the speakers feel that they have an attentive, considerate audience.

The program must also develop the students' ability to communicate in writing, especially in forms such as are regularly found in subject matter transfer courses. Emphasis in instruction should be on content and organization of the papers rather than on such things as spelling and punctuation, matters that have usually been sources of pain for remedial students. The consequences of writing must be satisfying. The initial concern is to develop a willingness, or even a desire, to write.

Other skills. The program should include all skills that are pertinent to any area of the transfer program. However, because there are time limitations on the program, those skills that are restricted to specific courses of limited popularity must tend to be neglected in favor of those with broader application. The latter include studying for tests, taking objective tests, taking notes on lectures and discussions, performing laboratory experiments, etc. In all cases the skills must be practiced successfully and realistically if the skills are to continue to be practiced after the remedial program. That is, the skills must be practiced with respect to content and tasks actually found in transfer courses.

Development of attitudes and qualities of personality

An effective remedial program must develop in the students self-confidence, awareness of themselves (that is, awareness of

the real nature of their goals, of their capacities, and of their limitations), and, if they are to make adjustments and improvements, awareness of alternative goals, means, behaviors, and modes of dealing with their problems.

Self-confidence. One of the most important requirements of the program is that it develop the self-confidence of the students especially with respect to academic situations. The school and the teachers must show the students that they consider them to be important and worthy of real attention and that they have confidence in them and expect them to succeed. The name given the program should be one that suggests that the students already have worthwhile qualities and are going to add to them. The hours, facilities, and staff assigned to the program should not suggest that the program is less important than other programs in the school. Teachers and counselors must show interest in the students and respect for their contributions. Especially in the early stages of the program teachers must make it clear that they believe the students can do what is asked of them and that what is asked of them is important in its own right, will lead to significant consequences for the students, and is not a watered-down version of something that is ordinarily too difficult for remedial students. The program must provide frequent opportunities for successful performances of academic tasks and, in particular, must provide interested, receptive audiences for both oral and written communications. With respect to the latter, the program should provide more opportunities for oral and written communication with classmates than is usually the case in ordinary instruction.

In developing self-confidence, the program should build upon

whatever sources of confidence already exist. For example, a student who is proficient in some sport should be encouraged to participate in that sport at a level at which he can succeed, and his success should be given recognition by counselors and teachers, and even the school generally when appropriate. It is almost certainly more than coincidence that so many outstanding athletes are subsequently successful in business and other undertakings. Achieving a high degree of success in one endeavor undoubtedly develops positive qualities of personality that increase the likelihood of success in other endeavors.

Awareness of goals, capacities, and limitations. The program must give students a clear awareness of what the consequences of achieving their goals would be for them and of what commitments of effort, time, and money would be required to achieve these goals in the light of their real capacities. It must make the students aware of the true nature of their learning difficulties and of the consequences of these difficulties and must remove merely imagined difficulties. In particular, it must give them an understanding of the real nature of language and language learning and of the relationship of their own particular language behavior (in reading and in communication) to their academic careers and to their vocational and social expectations. It must make students aware of their own behaviors that interfere with academic success and of emotions that are aroused by academic situations that lead to avoidance behaviors incompatible with academic success. It must make them aware of the consequences of their psychological, physical, or social problems for their academic

performances and of conflicts between behavior patterns, value systems, etc., and their desired academic performances.

Awareness of alternatives. If students are to make use of their increased self-awareness to adjust their goals more realistically to their capacities and to improve their academic performances, then they must be made aware of alternative goals and means to achieve them, of alternative behaviors that can facilitate academic success, and of alternative modes of dealing with their problems (including ways of getting help).

It is clear that if the program is to be successful in developing the necessary attitudes and qualities of personality then the program must give far greater emphasis to counseling, much of it individual, than is ordinarily done.

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